

Understanding the reality of development

by Mark Pavilons

There will always be a need for housing and urban development.

That's a given and I don't think anyone can argue against it.

Yet, developers have traditionally been seen as the 'bad guy' in the scenario.

We say all they're only interested in making the most profit they can on a parcel of land, and build as many homes as they can. That may be true to an extent, but they are still putting their names to a subdivision or a community.

They are filling a need.

They respond to demand and consumers continue to demand nice single-detached homes in great neighbourhoods. The market determines the location, price and amenities.

Yes, homes in Caledon and King are expensive, and so are property taxes. This is not new, and has never been a secret.

Some interesting comments arose from local all-candidates debates during the recent municipal election campaign.

Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) asked candidates about who should take the lead in local development. They also wanted to know about the local need for housing stock.

Everyone agreed that the municipality should take the lead, or be the definitive voice on future development. The fact is, the municipality has always been the main player in local development matters. Planners and politicians have, for many years, decided how our communities grow and take shape.

In recent years, our provincial government has enacted strong legislation to protect our green spaces and important natural features.

So, the Greenbelt, Oak

Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment are all protected. Growth is quite restricted in these areas. The Province's Places to Grow Act further concentrates growth on recognized urban centres and within those boundaries.

Given these mandates from the upper level of government, municipalities have to play within the rules. They can, and do, work with developers to create the best scenarios and subdivisions that complement our existing communities.

We simply can't say no, or refuse any legally permitted development. We can't exist in a bubble.

Sure, many communities could use more affordable housing (whatever that is), such as townhouses, even small apartment buildings.

Just as our leaders provide adequate shelter for us to live in, they also try to ensure we have proper commuter roads, transit services and yes, jobs. Ideally, every community has that perfect ratio of industrial and commercial operations to residential houses. In a perfect world, this ideal mix would shift the tax burden away from homeowners so we could all breathe a sigh of relief.

But King, like many semi-rural areas in the GTA, simply don't have, or can't attract, light industry.

People moved to King, Caledon, and the northern GTA to escape the congested urban centres. We're seeing an influx of residents from Vaughan, which is quickly becoming a massive city.

Residents want the peace and quiet, wide open spaces, parks, trails, forests, all within an easy commute of the city. Well, we have it.

But you have to pay a premium to get it.

During the debates, all of the candidates - newcomers and incumbents alike - noted we have to work with the development community. We can't afford to be confrontational or be constantly at odds.

Councillors point out that with every new proposal or project, there is always give and take, asks, wants and compromises. That's how things get done.

One resident who spoke at one of the meetings, noted he's quite happy with his roads and his taxes! It was also mentioned that we all pay for where we live.

Subdivisions haven't really changed much over the decades. Sure, they've become more beautiful given the variety of building materials and finishes. The sky's the limit these days.

One thing that still bothers me is the archaic and ugly positioning of garages in front of our homes. As we moved to planned communities and the suburban tract development in the 1970s, the automobile dominated the landscape and so the 'carriage house' moved to the front. The front porch, which was once our social gathering place, dwindled and our activities moved to the back yard. This was the beginning of the end of social interaction, in my opinion.

People complain about traffic, but they seem to believe it's someone else doing the driving. It's not. The traffic is generated by local residents, especially those with two and three cars per family. We are responsible for the congestion, speeding and driving infractions. Our dependence on the automobile will be our undoing.

That being said, it's not all doom and gloom. We can be proactive in our approach. We can be engaged in every subdivision application that comes before the Township, whether it's in our neighbourhood or not. King staff and politicians rely on citizens' input and suggestions and do their best to accommodate them.

Some key planning documents, like the Official Plan and rural zoning bylaws, are being discussed in 2019. The onus is on everyone to take part, or least let your councillor know what you'd like to see.

Council does listen, and they have the best interests of the community at heart.